



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

News Release

September 13, 2005

Tulare County Sheriff's Deputy Arrested for Possessing Child Pornography *Search of man's home turns up explicit images of two and three-year-old children*

VISALIA, Calif. – A deputy for the Tulare County Sheriff's Department was arrested today by agents with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) on suspicion of possessing child pornography obtained over the Internet.

John Sickler, 40, was taken into custody at his Visalia home this morning by ICE agents after a search of the residence turned up numerous digital images and computer movie files of children, some believed to be as young as two or three years old, being sexually abused by adult men. ICE agents received assistance in this morning's operation from officers with the Fresno County Sheriff's Department, the Visalia Police Department, and the California Department of Justice.

Sickler, who has been employed by the Tulare County Sheriff's Department since 1995, is expected to be arraigned on the federal charges tomorrow morning in U.S. District Court in Fresno. In the meantime, he is being held at the Fresno County Jail.

"This shows that sexual predators do not fit any particular stereotype. They come from all walks of life," said Scott Brown, resident agent-in-charge of ICE investigations in Fresno. "What makes this case particularly disturbing is that this individual was entrusted with safeguarding the public and he betrayed that trust by engaging in illegal acts that violate those in our society who are most vulnerable, our children."

The investigation targeting Sickler began as the result of a lead provided by ICE's Cyber Crimes Center in Fairfax, Virginia. The Center is recognized worldwide as a leader in the investigation of international criminal activities conducted on or facilitated by the Internet, including crimes involving the possession, manufacture, and distribution of child pornography.

The case is part of Operation Predator, an ongoing ICE enforcement initiative to identify, investigate, arrest and, in the case of foreign nationals, deport child sex predators. Since the initiative began in July 2003, ICE agents have arrested more than 6,200 individuals nationwide, including more than 1,600 in California.

ICE encourages the reporting of suspected child predators and any suspicious activity through its toll-free hotline at 1-866-DHS-2ICE. This hotline is staffed around the clock by investigators. Suspected child sexual exploitation or missing children may be reported to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, an Operation Predator partner, at 1-800-843-5678 or <http://www.cybertipline.com>.